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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 004283

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/WE, WHA/AND AND WHA/CCA

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM SP

SUBJECT: SPAIN: ZAPATERO TO RAISE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES WITH CHAVEZ

REF: STATE 223273

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathleen M. Fitzpatrick,
reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) The Government of Spain is aware of all three human rights issues raised in reftel demarche. The Spanish agree that the possible moves by Chavez supporters threaten democracy, human rights and civil rights in Venezuela. The Zapatero government will raise these issues with Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez's during his visit to Madrid November 22-23, a visit which Chavez insisted on making, according to Spanish Foreign Ministry interlocutors. However, given President Zapatero's desires to build dialog with Chavez, we do not expect him to press Chavez hard on these questions.
End summary.

GOS To Raise Demarche Issues During Chavez Visit

12. (C) Poloff raised reftel issues November 4 with Ernesto de Zulueta, the MFA's deputy director general for Andean countries. With respect to the arrest warrants for the SUMATE NGO, de Zulueta said he understands the process has essentially been put on hold for the moment. De Zulueta said further that the Spanish government plans to address this matter, as well as the two disturbing proposed laws we raised in the demarche, with Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez when he visits Madrid November 22-23. According to de Zulueta, the GOS has discussed all three issues with its EU partners, but in the end, Spain decided that direct talks between the Zapatero and Chavez governments would be more useful than a public declaration by the GOS or the EU. We emphasized the urgency of these matters to Zulueta and urged the Spanish government to raise them with the Venezuelan government sooner, but de Zulueta argued the Chavez visit offered the best opportunity to press the Venezuelans effectively.

Chavez "Insisted" on Visit

13. (C) De Zulueta took pains to emphasize that the GOS agreed to Chavez's visit only after lengthy, dogged insistence on Chavez's part. "The impetus for the meeting came from Chavez, not from the Government of Spain, I can assure you," explained de Zulueta. (In late October, FM Moratinos' chief of staff told us the same -- Chavez insisted on coming to Madrid.) Chavez will be traveling with a group of Venezuelan businessmen and women. De Zulueta did not yet know who else would accompany Chavez or whether FM Perez would join trip. The GOS's only goal for the visit will be to begin some form of constructive dialog with Chavez, something, claimed de Zulueta, that was not occurring under the Aznar government due to the strained relationship between the former Spanish president and Chavez. The Spanish government has no other agenda for the meeting at this point, according to de Zulueta.

14. (C) De Zulueta also asserted that the Spanish government has no illusions about the likelihood of progress with Chavez -- in fact, troubling developments in Venezuela such as the three issues reftel demarche raised signal a weakening of democracy and human rights in Venezuela. However, Zapatero believes Spain must at least make an attempt to build some sort of constructive relationship with Chavez because he won the August referendum and "is the only game in town." The opposition remains remarkably disorganized and ineffective, de Zulueta noted.

Comment

15. (C) De Zulueta's explanation of why Spain needs to open dialog with Chavez is nearly identical to Spain's reasons for wanting to do the same with Castro, though the Venezuela issue is much less contentious in Spain. Although de Zulueta

said Spain does not have high hopes for dialog with Chavez, Zapatero clearly thinks he can build bridges where Aznar could not or would not. Zapatero believes his efforts to build a relationship with Chavez are consistent with his self-image as a "man of dialog," a phrase he has uttered repeatedly since the Socialists prevailed last March. We expect Zapatero government to raise the issues outlined in reftel demarche with Chavez during his visit in late November, but not to press hard, because it is highly unlikely Zapatero will risk turning Chavez off during the Madrid visit.

ARGYROS